

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 215059
ORIGIN NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
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DRAFTED BY NEA/ARN:MACASEY:CF
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TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY
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USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 215059

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, SY, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: AUGUST 23 CONVERSATION WITH SYRIAN
CHARGE, ABOUCHAER

1. ABOUCHAER TOLD NEA DEP ASST SEC DRAPER THAT FORMER
LEBANESE FONMIN, UN REP, AMB. TO U.S. CHARLES MALEK WAS
ORGANIZING MARONITE COMMUNITY LEADERS IN SOUTH AMERICA AND
INTENDS TO REQUEST A MEETING FOR THE GROUP AND HIMSELF WITH
PRESIDENT CARTER. THROUGHOUT CONVERSATION, ABOUCHAER
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PAGE 02 STATE 215059

STRESSED THAT RECEPTION OF MALEK BY HIGH LEVEL USG OFFICIALS
WOULD (1) AFFECT SYRIA'S ROLE IN LEBANON; (2) WEAKEN U.S.
EFFORTS TO PROMOTE PEACE; AND (3) WEAKEN THE EFFORTS OF
THE CENTRAL LEBANESE GOVERNMENT TO REESTABLISH ITS AUTHORITY.
SUCH A MEETING WOULD BE PLAYED AS U.S. SUPPORT FOR THE
EXTREMIST CHRISTIAN POSITION.

2. DRAPER SAID HE CONSIDERED IT DOUBTFUL THAT PRESIDENT WOULD BE ABLE TO RECEIVE MALEK, WITH OR WITHOUT SUCH A DELEGATION. MALEK HAD ALSO REQUESTED OTHER APPOINTMENTS. WITHIN A FEW DAYS, DRAPER CONTINUED, MALEK WOULD PAY A CALL ON NEA ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY CRAWFORD, WITH DRAPER PRESENT. RECEIVING MALEK AT THIS LEVEL WAS ONLY APPROPRIATE AND COURTEOUS GIVEN THE FACT THAT MALEK HAD LONG ENJOYED A CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE USG GOING BACK TO

UN CHARTER DAYS. DRAPER ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THERE WERE THOSE WHO WOULD INTERPRET THIS SIMPLE COURTESY AS SOMEHOW DESIGNED TO SIGNAL USG ASSOCIATION WITH HIS VIEWS. ABOUCHAER WAS FAMILIAR WITH USG PRACTICES IN THIS REGARD AND SHOULD BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN THIS TO DAMASCUS. DRAPER ADDED THAT, AFTER LISTENING TO MALEK, WE WOULD HAVE A SPLENDID OPPORTUNITY TO PUT ACROSS OUR OWN POINTS CLEARLY. ABOUCHAER GLOOMILY NOTED THAT DAMASCUS WOULD NEVER UNDERSTAND.

3. ABOUCHAER THEN ASKED WHETHER THERE WAS ANY SIGNIFICANCE IN DRAPER'S USE OF THE PAST TENSE IN RECENT TESTIMONY TO A SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE DESCRIBING SYRIA'S INDISPENSIBLE ROLE IN ASSURING SECURITY IN LEBANON "FOR MORE THAN A YEAR." HE ASKED FOR CLARIFICATION OF THE U.S. POSITION TOWARDS THE SYRIAN ROLE. DRAPER EXPLAINED THAT, IN HIS TESTIMONY, HE WAS SIMPLY DESCRIBING A SITUATION UP TO THE TIME OF THE SADAT INITIATIVE, WHICH WE RECOGNIZE IN CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 STATE 215059

RETROSPECT HAD ALTERED THE POSITIONS OF SOME PLAYERS IN LEBANON. DRAPER THEN WENT ON TO SAY THAT A WITHDRAWAL OF THE SYRIAN AND OTHER ADF ELEMENTS FROM ALL OF LEBANON COULD BE A CATASTROPHE, WIDENING THE RISK OF MAJOR CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS AND THE PALESTINIANS AND CIVIL CONFLICT ON THE SCALE OF 1976 AMONG OTHER POSSIBILITIES. IT WAS OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT SYRIA WOULD WITHDRAW ITS FORCES AS SOON AS THE MILITARY AND POLICE FORCES UNDER THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT WERE ABLE TO PRESERVE SECURITY AND THAT, BECUASE OF THE FINANCIAL AND OTHER BURDENS, SYRIA HOPED THAT THIS COULD OCCUR AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE. ON THE OTHER HAND, DRAPER ADDED, SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE SECURITY SITUATION IN BEIRUT PRESENTED A SPECIAL PROBLEM. THE U.S. WAS PLEASED TO SEE THE PROCESS OF MUTUAL DISENGAGEMENT OF SYRIAN AND CHRISTIAN MILITIA FORCES FROM FLASH POINTS. WE HOPE THE MUTUAL DISENGAGEMENT COULD PROCEED FURTHER. IT WAS IMPORTANT TO REDUCE TENSIONS, PROBLEMS AND THE PROBABILITY OF FUTURE CONFRONTATIONS. IF IT TURNED OUT THAT THE SYRIAN FORCES ULTIMATELY WITHDREW FROM MOST OF THE CHRISTIAN QUARTERS, BUT REMAINED IN A POSITION TO INTERDICT PALESTINIAN-MARONITE CONFRONTATIONS, IT MIGHT WELL BE IN SYRIA'S

INTEREST. SOME OF THE PROBLEMS WHICH HAD LED TO THE MILITIA-SYRIAN CONFRONTATIONS WERE VIRTUALLY INSOLUBLE, AND IT MIGHT BE BETTER FOR THE SYRIANS TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES, USING THE RATIONALE THAT AT LEAST SOME LEBANESE ARMY AND POLICE UNITS WERE ABLE TO TAKE OVER CERTAIN MINIMAL SECURITY REQUIREMENTS.

4. COMMENT: THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT ABOUCHAER HAD NOT REACTED NEGATIVELY TO THE CONCEPT OF FURTHER SYRIAN

DISENGAGEMENT FROM BEIRUT. CHRISTOPHER

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